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SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV
TREASURY FOR USED IBRD AND IDB AND INTL/MDB
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: LIZ MAHEW
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY
INTERIOR FOR NPS: JONATHAN PUTNAM
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: J WEAVER
JUSTICE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: JWEBB
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: G FLANLEY
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 114

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¶1. The following is part of a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. NOTE: THE NEWSLETTER IS NOW ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE BRASILIA INTRANET PAGE, BY CLICKING ON THE 'HUB' LINK.

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----- Agriculture -----

13. Colombian Palm Sector en route to Certification

OCT. 21, 2008 - On July 7, The National Federation of Palm Oil Growers (Fedepalma) launched a program to develop the National Interpretation of the Principles and Criteria of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in Colombia. The process involves adapting the generic RSPO principles and criteria to the Colombia national context. These indicators will serve as a basis for the certification of sustainable palm oil in Colombia by the RSPO. The process will be led by Fedepalma and has the backing of the Ministries of the Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development and of Agriculture and Rural Development. Cenipalma (the Center for Research on Palm Oil), the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Research on Biological Resources (IavH) and WWF Colombia will provide technical support to the process. The first results of this process were presented at the first Latin American meeting of the RSPO, which took place in Cartagena on October 16-17.

Source - WWF Forest Conversion News

14. Round Table on Responsible Soy Works on Global Outreach Program; US a Target

OCT. 2008 - In August, the third meeting of the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) Development Group (DG) took place in Puerto Iguazu, Argentina. Hundreds of stakeholder comments about the content of the principles and the ways of verifying them were

discussed. Important steps were taken in further developing the concept of responsible soy. It is now highly probable that the DG will be able to deliver the final version of the Principles and Criteria for responsible soy production (P&C) in May 2009 when it will be presented for approval at the RTRS General Assembly. A follow-up to the August meeting took place in Sao Paulo from October 10-13. Now, the document will be sent out for the second formal round of public consultation, which will last until the beginning of 2009 when the DG will meet again to prepare the final version. The RTRS is launching its Global Outreach Program, which aims to encourage soy producers, traders and processors to actively contribute to the development and adoption of the P&C. This program will play a crucial role in addressing the challenge of involving additional target groups and countries - mainly China, the USA and India - thereby creating a true global engagement.

NOTE: Member countries of the RTRS include Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.

Source - WWF Forest Conversion News

15. Aquaculture, Agro-Energy in Guyana, Brazil Talks

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SEPT. 24, 2008 - A high-level team of Brazilian technical officials met with senior representatives of Guyana's agricultural sector including Minister Robert Persaud to discuss areas of cooperation between the two states for greater agricultural development. Guyana has expressed interest in areas of forestry, fisheries, agro-energy and other non-traditional sectors. Minister Persaud noted Guyana's vast potential for agro-energy, adding that several proposals for investment in this area have been received from the Brazilian private sector. He however, cautioned the biofuel will be derived from sugar cane, and not corn, and that no land will be deforested to make way for the new plantations. Additionally, initial discussions were held to provide support in the management of Guyana's forestry resources via satellite technology. Guyana also requested greater bilateral cooperation and investment to further develop its aquaculture industry.

Source - Stabroek News

16. Uruguay Moving Forward With GMOs

SEPT. 17, 2008 - During a July press conference, Uruguay's Minister of Agriculture Ernesto Agazzi announced that the Government was repealing a moratorium that had been imposed on the approval of new GM varieties in January 2007. He said that Uruguay would instead adopt a policy of regulated coexistence of traditional, organic, and GM crops. The GOU also decided that the labeling of GM products would not be mandatory, given the high complexity and cost involved in the process. Uruguay has nearly 550,000 hectares planted with GMOs, and the GOU moratorium was enacted to enable the government to assess their impact.

Source - MONTEVIDEO 00000528

Forests

17. Wal-Mart Mulling Contribution to Brazil's Amazon Rainforest Fund

OCT. 26, 2008 - Wal-Mart may contribute to Brazil's national fund for conserving the Amazon rainforest, said Brazilian Environment Minister Carlos Minc. Speaking to the press following the first meeting of the Amazon Fund's Guiding Committee, Minc said that Wal-Mart, Petrobras, and the American energy company AES have expressed interest in contributing to Brazil's newly established national fund for promoting conservation and sustainable development of the Amazon rainforest. The fund seeks to raise up to US\$21 billion to protect and sustainably use the Amazon for perpetuity. Norway earlier pledged up US\$ 1 billion through 2021 to the fund. Some have complained that the Brazilian government has yet to detail either its plans to reduce deforestation or its plan on how much of

the Amazon it seeks to protect.

Source - Mongabay

18. U.S. Cuts Peru's Debt Payments by US\$25 Million In Exchange For Protecting Tropical Forest

OCT. 21, 2008 - United States and Peru agreed to reduce Peru's debt payments in exchange for protecting the country's tropical forest. Under the agreement more than 25 million dollars will be put towards conserving rain forest, announced Tuesday the US

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Department of State. This act complements an existing Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA) debt-for-nature program signed with Peru in 2002, a 1997 debt swap under the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative and the United States-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) signed last year which includes a number of forest protection provisions. With this agreement, the U.S. Department of State reports that Peru will be the largest beneficiary under the U.S. Tropical Forest Conservation Act, with more than 35 million dollars generated for conservation.

Source - Andina

NOTE from Embassy Lima - Embassy ESTH Office organized a successful announcement ceremony with Ambassador and Foreign, Environment & Economy/Finance Ministers.

19. Global financial crisis may help Amazon, says Brazilian Minister Minc

OCT. 07, 2008 - A global economic slowdown could help reduce destruction of the Amazon rain forest due to lower world commodity prices, opined Brazil's environment minister Carlos Minc. Moreover, Minc is quoted as saying that Brazil should set targets to limit deforestation. Speaking at the Reuters Global Environment Summit in Brasilia, Minc suggested that suspicions about foreign nongovernmental groups, or NGOs, operating in the Amazon were exaggerated. Some nationalists in Congress, the military, and government say that the growing presence of foreigners in the Amazon is undermining Brazil's sovereignty and fueling deforestation. "I think these accusations are being exaggerated. There are a few companies and NGOs linked to biopiracy. But they are the overwhelming minority," Minc said, referring to groups who allegedly smuggle plants to pharmaceutical laboratories abroad for commercial development. "Today the Amazon unfortunately is destroyed mostly by Brazilians," said Minc. Since taking office as minister in May, the founder of the Green Party in Brazil cracked down on illegal cattle ranchers and soy farmers, and is promoting forestry management to help conserve the world's largest rain forest. The fall in commodity prices resulting from a global economic slowdown will likely reinforce the government's own efforts in curbing deforestation, said Minc.

Source - Reuters News

110. Brazil: EU donates US\$8mn for an Amazon Sustainable Development Program

OCT. 02, 2008 - Brazil's environment minister Carlos Minc signed a technical cooperation agreement with the EU and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to support a sustainable development program in the Amazon, government news agency Radiobras reported. The EU will provide 5.8 million Euros (US\$8mn) in financing for the project. The program aims to promote productive alternatives to help stop deforestation around the BR-163, a 1,000km stretch that connects the cities of Cuiaba, in Mato Grosso state, and Santarem, in Para. "This is a way to guarantee the survival of the population. We have 24mn people living in the Amazon and they should live with dignity. With technical and financial support, we can find a way for them to live with dignity," Minc was quoted as saying. The BR-163 is currently being paved and is one of the government's projects to promote sustainable development in the area.

Source - Business News Americas

11. Forest Conservation Looms Large In Climate Debate, Bolivia Experience an Example

SEPT. 2008 - In 1997, two environmental groups and three energy companies teamed up to save parkland forests in Bolivia as a way to capture carbon and contribute to the fight against global warming. The deal, conceived by the Bolivian government, the U.S.-based Nature Conservancy and Bolivia's Friends of Nature Foundation (FAN), doubled the size of Noel Kempff Mercado National Park to 3.7 million acres (1.5 million ha) and involved investment of US\$10.5 million. Some of the funds were used to pay timber companies to stop logging in the area, which cut carbon emissions. And some became seed money for ecotourism and agroforestry projects aimed at curbing forest clearing. Today, the highly prized park sustains some of the richest ecosystems in the world and serves, many experts say, as a prime example of how to harness the power of carbon trading for the benefit of forests and forest communities. Debate about such efforts has moved to front and center as countries work on a so-called "road map" for a new climate-change agreement to supersede the 1997 Kyoto Protocol in 2013. Among the questions at issue is whether the new agreement should include a policy mechanism for combating climate change, known as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). The work at Noel Kempff offers a useful guide. "Noel Kempff is the only REDD project I know of that has been implemented and independently verified using the same standards as those developed under the Clean Development Mechanism," says Zok Kant, carbon finance manager for The Nature Conservancy in Arlington, Virginia. "That makes it unique, and it's taught us many lessons relevant to REDD discussions today."

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Wildlife

12. New Conservation Opportunities for Threatened Bolivian Birds

OCT. 10, 2008 - A team of biologists has made important new discoveries of populations of two bird species in the cordillera of Apolobamba in Bolivia. The critically endangered Royal Cinclodes bird was previously known primarily from highly fragmented Polylepis forests in the Andes of southeastern Peru, with an estimated remaining global population of just 50-250 individuals. The first sighting dates back to 1876, with more than a century passing before the second record in 1997. A few additional records came in 2002, at Cotapata National Park. The endangered Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant, meanwhile, was virtually unknown in Bolivia, with only three previous records from the Cordillera de La Paz. With support of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the American Bird Conservancy was able to fund a new study of the Polylepis forests in the northern Titicaca Lake basin, and the Cordilleras of La Paz and Apolobamba. Their research uncovered a total of 33 forest patches (an increase of 29), eight of which have since been identified as supporting Royal Cinclodes populations (compared to only one previously known). The team has also verified the presence of Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrants at 28 sites in 15 forests, containing up to 300 individuals or nearly one-third of the global population. New funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation aimed at sustaining biodiversity

in key protected areas of the Andes-Amazon region will help begin implementation of conservation measures in the region.

Source - American Bird Conservancy

13. Brazil Leads Efforts to Halt Species Extinctions

OCT. 08, 2008 - The Brazilian Environment Ministry has launched a program aimed at identifying and protecting Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites within its national borders. The program will be conducted in partnership with the Brazilian conservation organization Fundacao Biodiversitas, also an American Bird Conservancy partner. Projects in Brazil already underway include the conservation of the Lear's Macaw and Stresemann's Bristlefront, as well as habitat protection for the Crowned Eagle, Brown-backed Parrotlet, and many other vulnerable species endemic to Brazil.

Source - American Bird Conservancy

Fishing & Marine Conservation

¶14. Chile Enacts Law to Ban Cetacean Hunting In Chilean Coastal Waters

OCT. 15, 2008 - Chilean President Michelle Bachelet signed a law which prohibits the hunting of cetaceans (whales) within its jurisdictional waters. The new law calls the cetacean hunting a crime and the public are prohibited from killing, capturing, transporting, trading, storing or processing cetaceans, alive or dead. The law protects the key living spaces for these mammals and promotes the creation of the protected coast marine areas, parks or reserved areas. It also regulates actions in protection, rescue, rehabilitation, observation and monitoring of mammals, reptiles and hydrobiology birds. This law, which benefits 43 cetacean species in the Chilean waters, is an acquired compromise of Bachelet. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama also have banned cetacean hunting.

Source - Xinhua News Agency

Protected Areas

¶15. Chile Inaugurates New Siete Tazas National Park

OCT. 16, 2008 - Chile's President Michelle Bachelet inaugurated the new Siete Tazas National Park, the first park of its kind in south central Chile's Maule Region. Bachelet used the occasion to announce the creation of six additional protected areas that will take effect next year. These projects include national parks Salar de Huasco (Region I), Morro Moreno (Region II) and Alerce Costero (Region XIV), natural reserves Altos del Loa (Region II) and Laguna Cahuill (Region VI), and natural monument Quebrada Cardones (Region XV). Agricultural Minister Marigen Hornkohl emphasized that the inauguration of Siete Tazas National Park was the cumulative expression of efforts made by Chile's democratic government since 1990 to preserve and develop natural areas. The aim is to boost Chile's agricultural, forest and tourism activities.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

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¶16. Chile's Protected Sites Fail to Protect 73 Percent of Vertebrate Species

SEPT. 23, 2008 - A recent study by the Universidad Catolica's Center of Advanced Studies in Ecology and Biodiversity (CASEB) revealed that Chile's protected nature areas are failing to fully protect 73 percent of Chile's 653 vertebrate species. Further, at least 13 percent of Chile's vertebrate species are not covered by any protected territory. Out of Chile's 46 threatened and endemic vertebrates - which include the Darwin frog, the Matuasto lizard and the long-tail snake from the north - only nine are fully protected, whereas four have no protection and 33 only have partial protection. Researchers who compiled the study hope it will help redefine the protection zones, and they insist that the participation of private property owners is key to species conservation. Now, the investigators are focused on analyzing how the system should develop over the next 100 years in the face of climate change, thereby

enabling them to design a system that not only protects all the species, but also resists the disturbances that are to come.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

Pollution

17. Pollution Kills More than AIDS and Traffic Accidents Combined in Sao Paulo

OCT. 14, 2008 - According to Paulo Saldiva, from the University of Sao Paulo's Atmospheric Pollution Lab, 150 deaths can be avoided per year by simply reducing the amount of sulfur in the diesel used by vehicles. Studies carried out by the lab point out that diseases caused by pollution such as respiratory problems and heart-attacks, cause nine deaths per day in the city. This represents nearly 3,500 deaths per year. Deaths caused by AIDS and traffic accidents combined totaled 1,624 last year. According to the lab, the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo spends nearly US\$1.5 billion per year to treat diseases caused by air pollution.

Source - Folha de Sao Paulo

Climate Change

18. Brazil Tests Carbon Reduction in Amazon Forest

OCT. 17, 2008 - In the Juma forest reserve deep in Brazil's Amazon, conservationists will receive money from a Brazilian bank and a global hotel chain to protect trees and combat global warming. The project is seen as a test case watched by other potential donors, mostly in rich countries, who want to help preserve tropical forests as a way to reduce their carbon footprints but have doubts about accountability and measuring success. The Washington, D.C., area-based Marriott hotel chain agreed to donate \$2 million over four years to the State of Amazonas' Foundation for a Sustainable Amazon, which runs the project. The money is donated to compensate for the carbon emissions of its guests worldwide and will help the foundation protect 34 forest reserves in the Amazon totaling 41 million acres (16.4 million hectares), which it already manages.

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Hotel guests will also be asked to donate \$1 to the project, the foundation said. Brazil's Bradesco bank and the Amazonas state government each donated 20 million Reais (\$9.4 million) to the foundation, which was created in December.

Source - Alertnet.org

19. Southern Chile Glacial Lake Disappears, Again

OCT.12, 2008 - The Cachet 2 glacial lake, located in the southern Chilean region of Aysn (Region XI), disappeared last week for the second time in six months. The lake spilled into the nearby Baker River, possibly due to a phenomenon some say is related to global warming. Chile's General Water Office (DGA) measured a 4.7-meter rise in the water level of the Baker River. The change, which occurred over the course of 20 hours, indicated that the volume of the river's flow had risen from its normal 573 cubic meters of water per second to 3007 cubic meters per second. The emptying of the lake caused flooding along a nearby road, prompting officials to dispatch a boat to rescue people and animals where necessary. This is the second time that Cachet 2 has drained this year. In April, the lake completely vanished in a matter of 12 hours, causing flooding in nearby towns and farming communities. Experts attributed the April event to Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), a phenomenon caused by a sudden increase in a lake's volume. The volume increase can be due to one of a number of causes, including a volcanic eruption or part of a glacier falling into the lake. Although experts say GLOF can be a naturally occurring phenomenon, some point to global warming as a factor which is increasing the rate of

glacial melt and break-up.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

120. Peru Studies Climate Riddle as the World Heats Up

OCT. 06, 2008 - Scientists are using everything from a yellow submarine to weather balloons and special airplanes to solve a climate conundrum: why is the ocean off the coast of Peru getting colder while the rest of the world heats up? Researchers from Europe, the United States and South America started collecting reams of data this week from clouds, the shoreline and deep underwater to try to figure out the dynamics of the southeastern Pacific Ocean. The area, home to a fifth of the world's fish stocks, plays a crucial part in global weather patterns and scientists want to discover why temperatures have dropped in the Peruvian oceans along the desert coast. "Peru has a very important role in global climate," said Alexis Chaigneau, a French scientist leading experiments in Peru. "Over the past 50 years, the ocean off of the Peruvian coast has gotten colder, mainly because of stronger winds that have pulled up the deep cold waters of the ocean current." For the next three months, everything from a small satellite-controlled submarine to cloud-hugging airplanes will feed computers with information on oxygen levels in the water, temperature, salinity, wind speeds and current.

Source - Reuters

Energy

121. Plan for Dams in Puyehue National Park outrages Environmentalists

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OCT. 06, 2008 - Chile's leading environmental groups are up in arms over Hidroaustral's (energy company) plans to build run-of-the-river hydroelectric dams in Region X's Puyehue National Park. National parks, under Chilean law, are normally protected from development of this kind. Region X court is currently reviewing the legality of the Hidroaustral's controversial "Palmar-Correntoso" hydroelectric project, which was approved earlier this year for construction by regional environmental authorities. Region X COREMA's decision to approve the US\$20 million Palmar-Correntoso dams outraged environmentalists and some members of Congress. The problem isn't so much the project itself, which is by all accounts "environmentally friendly," but rather its location - smack dab inside Chile's most visited national park. Under both national and international law, critics point out, national parks are supposed to be off limits to such commercial activity. In 1967, for example, Chile ratified the Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere. Originally drafted in 1940 in Washington D.C., the convention prohibits all types of commercial exploitation of resources located within protected areas.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

122. Giving priority to Thermo Plants "Myopic", says Brazil Energy Expert

OCT. 02, 2008 - Brazil's power regulator Aneel has criticized the increased participation of fuel oil-fired thermo plants in recent energy auctions and defended hydroelectric plants as a cleaner energy source. In a September 30 power auction for delivery in 2013, a total of 23 thermo plants sold energy and only one hydro project took part due to a number of environmental restrictions. "Developed countries have already explored around 70% of their hydro potential, while Brazil has explored less than 30% and is creating barriers," Aneel general director Jerson Kelman said on the sidelines of an energy conference in Rio de Janeiro. "Brazil has once again chosen to produce energy by burning oil instead of using water, a renewable fuel. If a Martian came to Brazil, he would have a hard time understanding this option," Kelman joked. "To give priority to thermo plants is myopic because these plants result in neither financial nor environmental gain." Wind power is still very

expensive and not competitive enough for it to have a significant share in the energy matrix, he argued. "Those who talk about wind or solar power don't take into account the price impact of these sources on the consumer," Kelman added. "From a technological point of view, it's possible, but economically it would be like doubling energy prices," he said. "I'm in favor of wind power for the future, maybe in 10 years."

Source - Business News Americas

123. Wind Farms Could Completely Power Chile's Chiloe

OCT. 01, 2008 - An ambitious windfarm project set for the southern island of Chilo could - by as early as 2010 - make the island the first place in Chile fully powered by renewable energy. And, if things go according to plan, Chiloe might even be able to export electricity to the mainland. The project is slated for Mar Brava and Guapilacuy, rural areas located northwest of Ancud, Chiloe's capital city. The wind farms would occupy some 1,400 hectares and together boast an installed generating capacity of roughly 140 megawatts (MW) - enough energy to power approximately 700,000 homes. Chiloe's total current energy needs are estimated at 90 MW. Chiloe is attached to Chile's central energy grid, known as the SIC, via

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power lines that run over the Chacao Channel. Right now, much of its electricity is derived from fossil fuel burning plants located mostly on the mainland. The companies behind the project - Ecopower, a Chilean firm, and Spanish-owned Enhol-Chile - expect to spend approximately US\$300 million.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

124. Brazil to Unveil Auto Fuel-Efficiency Stickers

SEPT. 2008 - Brazil's state-run standardization institute is preparing to present a fuel-efficiency sticker for the nation's 17 car makers and 10 car importers to post voluntarily on new vehicles, starting with 2009 models. The sticker, a prototype of which was displayed at Brazil's national auto show in Sao Paulo from Oct. 30 to Nov. 9, is the work of the National Institute of Metrology, Standardization and Industrial Quality. The institute, called Inmetro, provides measurement standards and energy ratings for manufactured products. Inmetro spent the last two years working with Brazilian car makers and importers to devise the sticker, which is to be placed on the driver's side window. The institute traditionally has not required the posting of energy ratings for manufactured products, and it is not doing so in the case of the automobile initiative. That's because mandatory ratings would require a longer bureaucratic process, says Alexandre Novgorodcev, director of Inmetro's fuel-efficiency-rating program. A voluntary program, he says, is quicker to start and will likely find broad acceptance among car sellers in any event.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Extractive Industries

125. Report Says Los Pelambres Mine Threatens Chile's Glaciers

OCT. 17, 2008 - A recent academic study accused Los Pelambres mine (MLP) of concealing important information about its knowledge of rocky glaciers near the mine and the damage the mining development has caused to the glaciers. MLP is located near Coquimbo in northern Chile and is owned by Chile's powerful Luksic family. The University of Waterloo study reported that MLP development between 2000 and 2006 severely impacted 2.84 million square meters of permanent reservoirs of water. The mine's intervention in the underground water supplies was "not announced in any of the environmental studies presented to authorities between 1998 and 2004," said the report. Canadian geographer Alexander Brenning and Chilean Guillermo Azocar headed the study and both highlighted that a mine's "intervention in a high solar radiation zone with scarce

rain makes no sense because water is so much more valuable in these areas."

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

126. Chile Forestry Officials Halt Mining to Protect Flamingos

OCT. 15, 2008 - Chile's National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) asked a court to halt mining company Quiborax's operations in northern Chile's Sarire salt flat, a protected area considered a natural monument. CONAF - the government agency that administers the country's national parks - claims the company is breaking the law by

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working too close to the nesting sites of the flamingos that inhabit the area. CONAF also requested that the court require the National Environmental Commission (CONAMA) to weigh in and demand an environmental impact study from the company. Quiborax mines ulexite, a mineral which is converted into boric acid and agrochemical products. A 1978 presidential decree granted the company permission to work in the protected salt flat. While the decree requires the company to take measures to protect local flora and fauna, it does not establish specific guidelines. A 1989 decree, however, is more precise, prohibiting mining activities within 3,000 meters of nesting sites.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

127. Argentina: La Rioja Does U-Turn on Open-Pit Mine Ban

SEPT. 2008 - Little more than a year after passing a prohibition on open-pit mining involving such toxic substances as cyanide or mercury, the legislature of Argentina's La Rioja province has reversed course and repealed the measure. The original ban was championed by the province's then vice-governor, Luis Beder Herrera, and it played a role in the impeachment and removal from office of the governor at the time, Angel Maza. Maza was criticized for allowing Canadian mining giant Barrick Gold to gain exploration rights to a gold mine abandoned in the 1920s on Famatina Mountain. "The real treasure of Famatina Mountain is the water," Beder Herrera declared in August of last year. "We are against them polluting our land and water." After passage of the open-pit mining ban, Beder Herrera became governor-first on a provisional basis, then in an Aug. 2007 election. And last month he presided over a 180-degree turn, executed by governing-party lawmakers in the provincial legislature. "The government is interested in promoting mining because it understands that if there is no mining investment in the province, we're going to postpone development of this province for generations," Mario Guzman Soria, the governing bloc's president, told lawmakers before the Aug. 7 repeal. He also remarked it isn't true that "all mining signifies death and pollution." Several days later, green groups in Famatina and Chilecito accused the governing party of "treason," declared Beder Herrera persona non grata and vowed to continue their fight.

Source - EcoAmericas

----- Infrastructure Development -----

128. Environmental Impact Statement Filed For Five-Dam Hydro Project in Chile

SEPT. 2008 - Green groups are stepping up protests in Chile now that proponents of five hydroelectric dams in the Patagonian region of Aysen have filed a long-awaited environmental-impact statement for the project. The 10,500-page impact study says the dams will require a total investment of US\$3.2 billion and possess a combined installed capacity of 2,750 megawatts. If the project wins approval, the sponsors, Italian- and Spanish-owned Endesa and Chile's Colbun, plan to begin construction next year. The first dam would come on line on the Baker River in 2014 and the last one would start up on the Pascua River in 2021. Construction is contingent not only on the impact-statement's approval, but also on authorization of a US\$2 billion, 1,500-mile transmission line to

deliver the energy to Santiago and other cities in central Chile.

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The dams would alter two prized Patagonian rivers, and the power line would require a 120-meter right-of-way to be cut through protected areas. But support for the projects is strong in business and government circles on account of Chile's strained power supplies.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

¶29. Finance Institutions, Corporations, and Conservationists Debate IIRSA

On Sept. 4, the Technical Coordinating Committee of IIRSA (CCT) hosted a small day-long meeting to discuss infrastructure and the Amazon. The meeting was motivated by a growing perception that IIRSA and related investment trends in the Amazon region are inducing perverse and unsustainable effects that are undermining the legitimacy of the infrastructure integration initiative. Under discussion for months, the meeting was perhaps a first, modest attempt to bring International Financial Institutions (IFIs), corporations, and conservationists together to debate the compatibility of large, high risk infrastructure projects in the Amazon with sustainable, equitable development outcomes. As a cooperative framework for coordination and planning, IIRSA remains fragile and largely ineffective in its ability to address some of the most urgent challenges. The lack of any legal or juridical framework to institutionalize integration principles remains a major obstacle (UNASUR is not viewed as a viable solution in the short term). The meeting emphasized the social, environmental and economic risks of IIRSA projects advancing much faster than integration planning, and with virtually no planning for social and environmental sustainability. The discussion sidestepped real discussion of the Rio Madeira project, the Peru Southern Interoceanic Highway, and other emblematic high risk projects that undermine meaningful consideration of sustainability.

Source - BICECA

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